



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT  
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## "HITLER'S LESSONS"

January 30th marked the 50th anniversary of Adolf Hitler's rise to the position of absolute dictator of Germany. This historic anniversary attracted little attention. In our country most people were preoccupied with the Super Bowl. In much of the world mere survival must always take precedence over reflections on history. In East and West Germany there were stiff pro forma statements acknowledging the significance of the date.

I want to devote this column to the principal lessons I believe can be learned from Hitler's horrible reign.

Hitler taught us that the earliest statements of an extremist may prove to be prophetic. When he first enunciated the key doctrines of the Nazi movement, the more extreme statements were invariably dismissed as "just rhetoric", "just for dramatic effect"--ideas he would "surely modify" as he came closer to power and responsibility.

The analysts were all wrong. Hitler's early views as expressed in his autobiography, Mein Kampf, were the views which guided him up to the moment of his death. In fact, he became less responsible rather than more responsible. He believed in his own dramatics every bit as much as his audiences did.

Small political groups are often dismissed. True, most of them never prove of any consequence. However, we should never lose sight of the obscure origins of the National Socialist Party. Hitler began without money and without ties to any of the ruling groups of either the Weimar Republic or pre-World I Germany. The aristocracy snubbed him because of his lowly origin. The military dismissed him as just another mentally defective veteran. Business and labor didn't even acknowledge his existence. Yet by 1933, most of the German ruling class saw him as their savior.

There are people who still cling to the sentimental notion that culture civilizes--that a society which embraces art, music, and literature must also be a humane society. Hitler disproved this once and for all. The majority of Germans were able to tolerate and even enjoy the heights of culture and the depths of barbarism at the same time.

Perhaps Hitler's most important lesson to the world was that if we wait too long the "decent opinions of mankind" have little bearing.

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By the time the western democracies faced the truth about Hitler, the civilized world was too poorly armed and too psychologically unprepared to respond adequately.

The saddest lesson of the Nazi and post-Nazi era is that "it" can and does happen again. World knowledge of the Holocaust did not save the Ibos of Biafra, the victims of Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia, or the targets of Idi Amin's maniacal fury.

For some, my last observation will be the most bitter to swallow. Hitler proved that for many the most hideous crimes of history paid quite nicely. Despite all the hoopla about the Nuremberg trials, the vast majority of high-level Nazis were never punished. They are to be found today in top posts in business, military, and government of East and West Germany. Others have built comfortable new lives in South America. So-called scientific geniuses amongst them have been welcomed in both Moscow and Washington. I have just read that Dr. Mengele is believed to be a popular family doctor at a pacifistic Mennonite colony in South America!

The Torah advises us that G-d places before us a choice: "Life or death, blessing or curse". G-d urges us to choose life. To fulfill this command, we must take with deadly seriousness even seemingly insignificant manifestations of evil. Now is the time to take a closer look at Arafat, Khadafi, Khomeini, and others who may be monsters-in-the-making.

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